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"How blithely might the bugle horn  
Chide, on the lake, the lingering morn!  
How sweet at eve, the lover's lute  
Oh me, when the groves were still and mute."  
—Lady of the Lake.

"Their wigwams that clustered o'er the vale,  
Have fled away like withered leaves  
Before the Autumn gale;  
But the memory liveth on your hills,  
Their baptism on your shore."—Sigourney.

VOLUME 15, NO. 17

THE WEIRS, LAKE WINNIPESAUKEE, N.H., THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2006

COMPLIMENTARY

## 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Release of "On Golden Pond"



"Winnepesaukee Legacy" by Peter Ferber. "Come here, Norman. Hurry up. The loons! The loons! They're welcoming us back." from "On Golden Pond" is one of the top 400 movie quotes of all time. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the classic movie which was filmed in New Hampshire. This limited edition print is available from the Art Place in Wolfeboro and from the Weirs Times.

# BEHIND THE SCENES OF ON GOLDEN POND WITH WRITER ERNEST THOMPSON

by Lorrie Baird  
Contributing Editor

Since its release 25 years ago, *On Golden Pond* has run long and wide as an international classic, striking an intergenerational chord in all of us. Ernest Thompson, who wrote the play at the age of 28, is no exception.

Thompson is a busy man, but he has his priorities straight. Thompson splits life between Santa Monica, California and his farm in New Hampton, and was in town for a short time. He could give me a half-hour interview at a local restaurant because daughter Danielle was visiting

from college and she needed his time. Later in his writer's commentary on the *On Golden Pond* DVD, Thompson confided that the experience invited introspection into his own life after he adapted the award-winning film from his Broadway play; "It made

See **THOMPSON** on page 32

## Laconia Main Street Hosts Silent Auction

Thursday & Friday,  
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The Laconia Main Street Program is pleased to announce that they are holding a Silent Auction on Thursday, May 4th from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., and Friday, May 5th, from 10 a.m. To 2:00 p.m.

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**THOMPSON**, from page 1  
me wonder what scenes I am not having in my own life." He also acknowledged: "The better father I am, the better filmmaker I am."

Ernest leaned in across the table and in an easy and relaxed manner said that he wrote *On Golden Pond* over a long Memorial Day weekend...and not from a good place in his life. He had just broken up with his girlfriend and "Her little boy came to spend the weekend with me." Thompson

readily admitted that at age 28, "I didn't know what I was doing...I wrote it free-form." (The way writer's write before they learn to be scared and have enough experience to become insecure.) Then he smiled and said that he *still* doesn't know what he's doing. His Academy Award, Golden Globe, and Writers Guild awards say otherwise. As part of a program at the New Hampton School, Ernest has granted temporary custody of his Oscar and Golden Globe to students.



The cast of *On Golden Pond*.

COURTESY PHOTO

For a couple of days they can try them on for size and perhaps earn their own one day.

"I had no idea I was writing anything that had lasting importance. Now I've made peace that *On Golden Pond* doesn't seem to be going away." *On Golden Pond* was back on Broadway last year with an all-black cast starring James Earl Jones and Leslie Uggams, winning Best Play, Broadway Drama Guild and Best Revival, 2005. "The play

drew a significantly large black audience, but shut down when James Earl Jones became ill." A national tour is slated to be launched this summer starring Tom Bosley from *Happy Days* and Michael Learned. "*On Golden Pond* has been translated into twenty-six languages, in forty countries," he said. "It's gratifying to know that somewhere in the world there are six actors sitting around a table and beginning work on a new production of *On Golden Pond*."

The Thompson family flew to Paris four years ago when two of his best-known plays, *On Golden Pond* and *The West Side Waltz* just happened to be in production at the same time. During the film commentary, Thompson muses about the many different interpretations there are of his original play. "There's not one way to do *On Golden Pond*...stage, film, musical, TV...I have come to accept there is no right interpretation." Still, 20

See **THOMPSON** on page 33

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# ERNEST THOMPSON:

## Playwright, Screenwriter, Actor and Director

Ernest Thompson was born November 6, 1949 in Bellows Falls, VT. Secondary school and college brought him to Massachusetts, Maryland, and Washington D.C.

Thompson enjoys a multi-layered career as a playwright, screenwriter, and theatrical director. During the 1970s he branched out into acting, but jokes that unemployment was a great motivation to keep writing. Thompson played ranger Matt Harper on NBC's short-lived 1974 series, *Sierra*. He's played parts in *Somerset*, *Another World*, and *Westside Medical* on TV, along with films *Star 80* and *Next Stop Wonderland*.



*On Golden Pond* opened off-Broadway, and moved to Broadway in the fall of 78. Thompson won the Broadway Drama Guild's Best Play Award in 1979. *On Golden Pond* became a hit movie in 1981. He earned the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay in 1982, also a Golden Globe and Writers Guild of America award. To date, *On Golden Pond* has been his signature work, but Thompson's career has certainly not been treading water since then.

*The West Side Waltz* – his second most famous play – opened on Broadway the fall following filming *On Golden Pond* and starred Katharine Hepburn. Later in the 80s he wrote *Sweet Hearts Dance*, a drama directed by Robert Greenwald and starring Susan Sarandon and Don Johnson.

In 1995 CBS made *West Side Waltz* into a movie that starred Shirley MacLaine, Liza Minnelli, Kathy Bates, and Jennifer Grey. In 1988 Thompson wrote the screenplay 1969 and in 1989, he directed it starring Robert Downey, Jr. and Winona Ryder. It is not widely known, but Ernest Thompson was part of a writing team that worked on the 1994 movie, *Forrest Gump*.

Thompson spent much of his time writing made for TV movies in the 1990s, with *Take Me Home Again*, shown on NBC starring Kirk Douglas, and he directed *Out of Time* on Showtime, which was nominated for an Emmy for Best Director. In 2001 Thompson directed his own TV version of *On Golden Pond* starring Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer. He also wrote and directed *Another Summer*, the musical *On Golden Pond* for the theatre.

Thompson is currently in pre-production in Providence, Rhode Island on *The Love Line* a romantic comedy he has written, will direct, and is also cast in the lead. Thompson has a keen sense of humor and is no stranger to comedy-writing having also written *Twinkle, Twinkle, A Good Time*, *The Constituent*, and *Answers*, aired on A & E, starring Eileen Brennan and Burgess Meredith, and *A Sense of Humor* starring Jack Lemmon, among many others in which Thompson also acted.

Ernest Thompson resides in New Hampton, New Hampshire and California which is closer to wife Kristie's work as a production designer. California is convenient, but Thompson enjoys living in New Hampshire. Thompson has two daughters, 22-year-old Heather, an actor in New York and Danielle, 21, attending college in Georgia. Son August is age 14, whom his dad describes as a "rock and roller."

**THOMPSON**, from page 32 years after the film, *On Golden Pond* was adapted to TV, and Thompson insisted on directing the play. "My version is deeper under the skin of the players. It hints at a lot of stuff that goes on in a lot of families."

### A lake, a cottage, and a fish named Walter...

A Vermont native, Ernest Thompson spent his summers on Great Pond in Maine, a property that has been in his family since 1908. Rituals such as saying "hello" to the lake in the spring and "goodbye" in the fall, canoe trips and talking to the loons, were part of the everyday cadence of lakeside living. Ernest wrote the lake into the script as a main character com-

plete with mood swings capable of imparting calm and renewal, terror and timidity...always demanding respect.

The Thayer cottage also played a key role. It's the kind of family cottage filled with books, walls papered with family photos, games to play, knick-knacks and mementos; all the cottage clutter that Thompson found comforting in its continuity. Award-winning cinematographer Billy Williams filmed the inside shots in soft natural light emitting a sense of timelessness. The lake, the cottage, the boats provided the backdrop, with so many of the furnishings and props supplied by local antique shops and businesses. But it was Thompson's characters that put a

backbone of strength and dignity and humor on this timeless classic, so expertly portrayed by Katharine Hepburn and Henry Fonda.

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See **THOMPSON** on page 35

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# "On Golden Pond" Changed Her Life

by Lorrie Baird  
Contributing Editor

It all started when *On Golden Pond* came to town...and it happened by accident. The filming of *On Golden Pond* in the Lakes Region impacted many lives and businesses, but for New Hampton resident Jane Michalski, she signed on for an adventure of a lifetime. Born and brought up in Center Sandwich, NH, Jane Nicoli could not have imagined spending Christmas with Robert Redford, living in Beverly Hills, or traveling to the Caribbean.

Jane had applied for a job to help care for an elderly man, but the timing didn't work out. Because

producer Bruce Gilbert was also renting office space from the same person, somehow, Jane's resume landed on his desk. Gilbert liked what he read and Jane was called in to interview for a nanny position. Two weeks later when Bruce's wife Ellen gave birth to their son Jordan, Jane went to work for the young couple. Jane, who was just 18 at the time, knew she had hitched on for an exciting ride when she returned to work after spending the day visiting her parents and Ellen said, "Hurry up and pack. We're going back to California!"

"Okay," she said. "But what do they wear in Cali-

fornia?"

Jane vividly recalls attending the *On Golden Pond* wrap party at the Hathaway House in Lacoia, but mostly because Michael Jackson was there. Although she met all the cast members, "He's the one I really remember; that, and asking, 'What the heck do you wear to a wrap party?'" She also remembers getting Jackson's autograph.

For producer Bruce Gilbert, one film project bled into another and even before *On Golden Pond* was in the can it was off to New York City to film another movie with Jane Fonda.

The Gilberts sublet an apartment on East 71<sup>st</sup>



New Hampton resident Jane Michalski worked as a nanny for *On Golden Pond* producer Bruce Gilbert and the job took her to places she never dreamed she'd go. Her neighbor is Ernest Thompson who wrote the screenplay.

LORRIE BAIRD PHOTO

Lake Winnepesaukee Historical Society

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Street while *Rollover* was being filmed. For a small town girl like Jane, it took some getting used to when stars such as Cissy Spacek and Art Garfunkel would frequently stop in for dinner. *Rollover* was followed by a two-week trip to St. Martin in the Caribbean. "We stayed in New York until the spring. Then I came home for the summer and went back to work with the Gilberts in the fall."

Another unforgettable memory for Jane was attending the premiere of *On Golden Pond*. This time, she knew what to wear. "I got to meet Charlton Heston and my all-time favorite lady Ruth Gordon, who was just as short and feisty in person as she was in the movies."

The premiere was an emotional experience for all, she recalls. "Everyone laughed at the right places and cried at the right places. You know, you see the dailies, but they're looking for lighting issues and sound issues... you don't see the whole picture until the premiere, and was really emotional." The entire staff walked away from that premiere knowing they had produced a

See **MICALSKI** on page 36

**THOMPSON**, from page 33 leaves the lake in the fall far better than when they arrived. It is an uncluttered storyline. Although it oozes with symbolism it's not the least bit sappy. It is a love story - masterful in its simplicity. Thompson's dialogue is graceful, punctuated with wit and humor as found in a rural mailman and a fish named Walter.

**"Writer, leave the set!"**

*On Golden Pond* was a first in many ways. It was Ernest Thompson's first film. It's the first time Henry ever performed with one of his children, and his last film. (Jane Fonda bought the rights to the film with the idea that her father would play the lead.) Especially notable is that acting icons Fonda and Hepburn met for the first time at a pre-production meeting. Ernest Thompson was there. But when filming began Katherine Hepburn demanded, "Writer, leave the set!"

"She had the quaint notion that she wasn't in the room when I wrote the script, why should I be there when she acted it? After a few weeks of hanging out at the donut table or being on the set when she wasn't working, she called and said, 'Please come to the set, you're humiliating me.' Score one for the writers," Thompson mused, adding, "She had no such problem when we did the play, 'The West Side Waltz,' the following fall."

Apparently, such crusty dialogue was Hepburn's body armor so as not to expose the underbelly of her own insecurities. Case in point: Hepburn emerged from her bungalow one day wearing an outrageous hat that was totally out of sync with her character. When asked that she change it, Katharine burst into tears. Yet she could be incredibly hard on others. During the filming Jane Fonda confided to Ernest that during her daily visits to Hepburn's bungalow, she was learning much from Katharine and that the two were bond-

ing.

Ernest heard another story from Katharine when he was invited to join her for a drink. "What's that Fonda girl's name? The one playing my daughter?"

"That would be Jane."

"She comes and sits on the floor. It's a bore. I wish she would go away," thereby astounding Thompson with "Hepburn's utter lack of generosity." Although the summer was a magical time overall for all involved in the filming, Hepburn's mean-spiritedness surfaced again when the film wrapped. The battered hat that Fonda wears throughout the movie was

given to him by Katharine Hepburn. The hat belonged to the great love of her life, Spencer Tracy. Before Tracy, the hat was owned by Western director John Ford, who gave Fonda his start.

Henry Fonda painted exquisite watercolors. As a memento of the film, he painted the three hats he wore and gave Hepburn the first print inscribed, "To my darling Kate...thanks for the memories." Trouble is, Fonda made 200 lithographs and Hepburn took great umbrage that her painting was not the one and only original. She told Ernest, who also had a copy, that he could have

the print when she died. But she didn't wait that long. One day she called him and said, "You can come and get it. I don't want it!" So he did.

"I have it," notes Ernest, "and I cherish it."

Reflecting back on the experience he says, "Working with her, I thought she was a pain in the ass, stubborn and myopic and mean. In real life, I found her charming and funny and we had great times together. But I was very young during the filming of *On Golden Pond* and it was my first movie: I'm sure I'd handle the situation differently now and not take personally her many and unex-

pected manifestations of what I'm sure was only insecurity."

He added, "I'm working on another project with Shirley MacLaine coincidentally, just the age Hepburn was when we began our long professional relationship. While I can see some similar traits - both women, after all, became stars at very young ages - now I just laugh. I consider myself the luckiest guy in the world to have had two opportunities each to work with two of the greatest and most dynamic actresses of our time."

As for Henry Fonda, he was simply grateful. "I See **THOMPSON** on page 37

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**MICHALSKI**, from page 34 winning film, she said. When the Gilberts moved to Marian City, just north of San Francisco, they were invited to spend a two-week Christmas vacation at Robert Redford Estates at Sundance in Provo, Utah. "I forgot to call home on Christmas Eve." Jane's mother was livid. Robert Redford was



On Golden Pond Director Bruce Gilbert and his wife Ellen introduce baby Jordan to the cast and crew of the classic film.

COURTESY PHOTO



Jane Michalski was just 18-years-old when she went to work for Hollywood director Bruce Gilbert's family as a nanny. Shown here with Jordan, the job took Jane to places she never dreamed she would go.

COURTESY PHOTO

stretched out before her mind. When Jane explained this to her mother, she understood. Her grandfather did not. The next big thing for

Jane was moving to Beverly Hills with the Gilberts and living in his father's mansion until Bruce could locate suitable real estate in Los Angeles. Tucking her leg underneath her in the living room of her cozy New Hampton ranch house, Jane couldn't be further away from her life in Beverly Hills. She recalls the experience as "pretty cool with the gardeners, the beautiful backyard, the pool people...and fresh produce driven to the house every day. It was quite interesting."

Reflecting on the entire experience Jane said simply: "I was single. I was eighteen. I had a blast." Today, Jane is married with two daughters Toni age 12 and Elysz, age 14, and a charismatic low-rider Bassett-Lab mix named "Arnold."

When asked if she knew what happened to her young charge later in life Jane said that she spoke with Jordan about 5 years ago. "He was under two and yet he recalled me showing him a hummingbird's nest in the backyard. He remembered walking out to the nest and checking the eggs every day for babies.... watching them grow and then fly away. He still remembered that." Although Jordan was surrounded by all the trappings of wealth, it was visiting the hummingbird's nest that stuck in his memory. "It was something so simple that he remembered, and that made me feel good."

Jane's job as a teacher's aid in the Special Education Department may not be nearly as exciting as her time spent working for a Hollywood producer... but there's more to this story. When the Michalski family moved into their New Hampton ranch, their neighbor strolled over to welcome them. As soon as Jane saw him she made a mental note, "I know that man from somewhere..."

That "somewhere" was the set of *On Golden Pond*. Jane's neighbor - and family friend - is Ernest Thompson, the writer of *On Golden Pond*.

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**THOMPSON**, from page 35  
thank God I lived long enough to play this role," he once confided in Ernest.

#### Success is...

It was the winter of 1980 when Thompson was hired to write the movie, to translate it from stage to screen and yet telegraph all its emotions and humor to the big screen. No small task, especially since filming was to begin in the spring. "It's a writer's role to take his fear, anxieties, sadness, anger and joy and impose it on a character. I am often asked what character I am closest to, and it's probably the old man. But I'm really all of them."

It was a summer of give and take for all the professionals on the set. Although Ernest got along well with director Mark Rydell, the scene where Norman Thayer is lost in the woods was not written into the play. Thompson, who enjoys "the simplicity, the economy of writing for the theatre," felt the scene would have been more "potent, chilling and grip-



*Katharine Hepburn and Henry Fonda paddling on Squam Lake filming a scene in **On Golden Pond**.*

COURTESY PHOTO

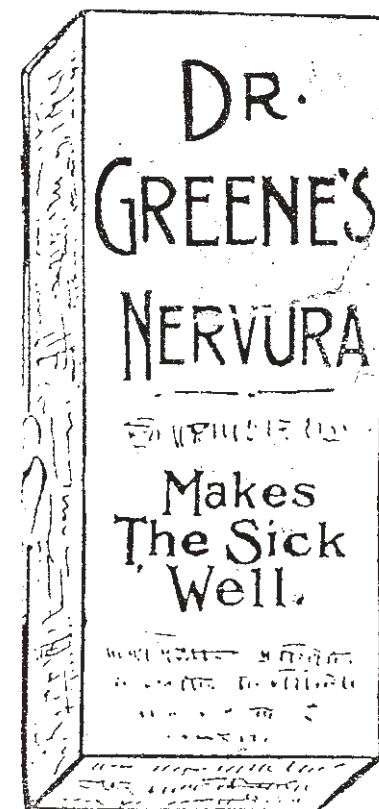
ping," if played in retrospect... from the writer's point of view. "Not that I'm right," he quips. "But I'm right."

Kate Hepburn interjected her own dialogue into the porch scene where Norman faces the ugly reality of his failing capacities and she calls him "her knight in shining armor." Overall, Thompson was happy with the scene saying, "The emotion comes through... it was a powerful moment." Although there were a few

more creative differences, they were minor. The fact that *On Golden Pond* was nominated for 10 Academy awards and Hepburn, Fonda and Thompson walked away with Oscars, says it all.

During his student days a professor said to Ernest Thompson, "If you move one person in the audience and you've succeeded in touching them...you are a success." On this the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *On Golden Pond*, the story continues to

touch countless thousands. As for Ernest Thompson's success, the numbers speak for themselves.

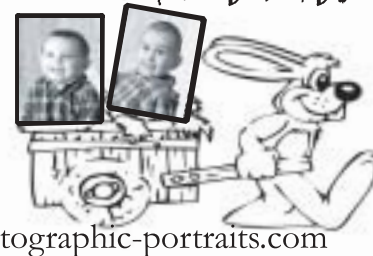


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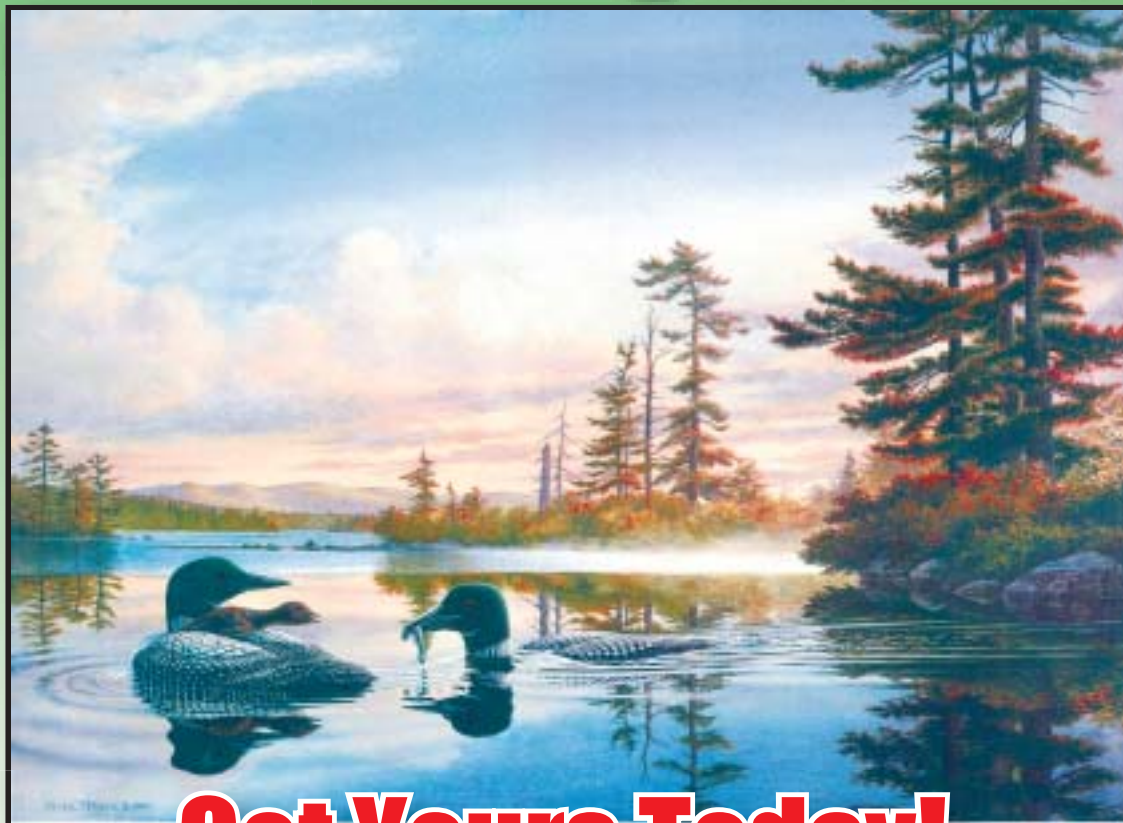
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